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WHOLENO. 223.

CONGRESS.

MR. SLADE'S SPEECH.

[Continued.]

But the petitioners are here met with another objection to granting the prayer of these petitions. It is made a question of public safety. To begin the work of abolishing slavery, and to banish the detestable traffic in human flesh from this District, will, we are told, tend to excite a spirit of insurrection in the Southern States; and gentlemen give full rein to their imaginations in depicting the horrors of rapine, and murder which will follow. I do not permit myself to doubt the perfect sincerity of gentlemen in these gloomy forebodings. I know they are in a position to see what I cannot see, and feel what I cannot feel. I will not allow myself to trifle with their views or feelings on this subject, though I must be permitted to doubt the correctness of the one, and the justness of the other.

And may I not well doubt? It is true I do not profess a very familiar acquaintance with the disposition of the slave population or the probable influence upon them of a discussion of, and action upon, this subject. And while I would hesitate to oppose my own individual opinion to the assertions of honorable gentlemen, so confidently made, they must permit me to confront them, not altogether with my own opinions, but with the authority of intelligent and respectable slaveholders themselves.

I hold in my hand a petition presented to this House in the year 1828, signed by more than eleven hundred citizens of this District, praying for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade within its limits. It was referred to the Committee on the District of Columbia, and remained unacted on until the last session, when it was called up, on motion of an honorable member from New Hampshire, (Mr. Hubbard,) and ordered to be printed, with the names of the signers. I send it to the chair, and ask that it may be read by the Clerk.

Here Mr. Garland, of Virginia, interposed, and said he should object to the reading of that and all other petitions on the subject, unless the gentleman used it as a part of his argument.

Mr. Slade replied that he intended so to use it, and should read it himself, but, being exhausted, he wished it read by the Clerk.

Mr. Garland withdrew his objection, and consented to the reading, as an act of courtesy to Mr. S.

The petition was then read by the Clerk as follows:

"To the honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled: We the undersigned, citizens of the counties of Washington and Alexandria, in the District of Columbia, beg leave to call the attention of your honorable body to an evil of serious magnitude, which greatly impairs the prosperity and happiness of this District, and casts the reproach of inconsistency upon the free institutions established among us.

"While the laws of the United States denounce the foreign slave trade as piracy, and punish with death those who are found engaged in its perpetration, there exists in this District, the seat of the National Government, a domestic slave trade scarcely less disgraceful in its character, and even more demoralizing in its influence. For this is not, like the former, carried on against a barbarous nation; its victims are reared up among the people of this country, educated in the precepts of the same religion, and imbued with similar domestic attachments.

"These people are, without their consent, torn from their homes; husband and wife are frequently separated and sold into distant parts; children are taken from their parents, without regard to the ties of nature, and the most endearing bonds of affection are broken forever.

"Nor is this traffic confined to those who are legally slaves for life. Some who are entitled to freedom, and many who have a limited time to serve, are sold into unconditional slavery; and, owing to the defectiveness of our laws, they are generally carried out of the District before the necessary steps can be taken for their release.

"We behold these scenes continually taking place among us, and lament our inability to prevent them. The people of this District have, within themselves, no means of legislative redress; and we therefore appeal to your honorable body, as the only one invested by the American Constitution with the power to relieve us.

"Nor is it only from the rapacity of slave traders that the colored race in this District are doomed to suffer. Even the laws which govern us sanction and direct, in certain cases, a procedure that we believe is unparalleled, in glaring injustice, by any thing at present known among the Governments of Christendom. An instance of the operation of these laws, which occurred during the last summer, we will briefly relate:

"A colored man, who stated that he was entitled to freedom, was taken up as a runaway slave, and lodged in the jail of Washington City. He was advertised, but no one appearing to claim him, he was, according to law, put up at public auction for the payment of his jail fees, and sold as a slave for life! He was purchased by a slave trader, who was not required to give security for his remaining in the District, and he was, soon after, shipped at Alexandria for one of the Southern States. An attempt was made by some benevolent individuals to have the sale postponed until his claim to freedom could be investigated; but their efforts were unavailing; and thus was a human being sold into perpetual bondage at the capital of the

freest Government on the earth, without even a pretence of trial, or an allegation of crime.

"We blush for our country while we relate this disgraceful transaction, and we would fain conceal it from the world, did not its very enormity inspire us with the hope that it will rouse the philanthropist and the patriot to exertion. We have no hesitation in believing your honorable body never intended that this odious law should be enforced; it was adopted with the old code of Maryland, from which, we believe, it has been expunged since the District was ceded to the General Government.

"The fact of its having been so recently executed, shows the necessity of this subject being investigated by a power which we confidently hope will be ready to correct it.

"We are aware of the difficulties that would attend any attempt to relieve us from these grievances by a sudden emancipation of the slaves in this District, and we would, therefore, be far from recommending so rash a measure. But the course pursued by many of the States of this Confederacy, that have happily succeeded in relieving themselves from a similar burden, together with the bright example which has been set us by the South American Republics, proves, most conclusively, that a course of gradual emancipation, to commence at some fixed period, and to take effect only upon those who may thereafter be born or removed into the District, might be pursued without detriment to the present proprietors, and would greatly redound to the prosperity and honor of our country.

"The existence among us of a distinct class of people, who, by their condition as slaves, are deprived of almost every incentive to virtue and industry, and shut out from many of the sources of light and knowledge, has an evident tendency to corrupt the morals of the people, and to damp the spirit of enterprise, by accustoming the rising generation to look with contempt upon honest labor, and to depend for support too much upon the labor of others. It prevents a useful and industrious class of people from settling among us, by rendering the means of subsistence more precarious to the laboring class of whites.

"It diminishes the resources of the community, by throwing the earnings of the poor into the coffers of the rich; thus rendering the former dependant, servile, and improvident; while the latter are tempted to become, in the same proportion, luxurious and prodigal.

"That these disastrous results flow from the existence of slavery among us, is sufficiently conspicuous, when we contrast the languishing condition of this District, and the surrounding country, with the prosperity of those parts of the Union which are less favored in point of climate and location, but blessed with a free and industrious population.

"We would, therefore, respectfully pray that these grievances may claim the attention of your honorable body, and that a law of Congress may be enacted, declaring that all children of slaves, born in the District of Columbia after the fourth day of July, eighteen hundred and twenty-eight, shall be free at the age of twenty-five years, and that those laws, which authorize the selling of supposed runaways for their prison fees or maintenance, may be repealed.

"And, also, that laws may be enacted to prevent slaves from being removed into this District, or brought in for sale, hire, or transportation; without, however, preventing members of Congress, resident strangers, or travellers, from bringing and taking away with them their domestic servants."

Mr. Patton inquired whether the gentleman from Vermont could inform him how many of the signers were slaveholders.

Mr. Garland made a further inquiry whether the gentleman from Vermont knew if they were all inhabitants of the District.

Mr. Slade replied, he could not inform the gentleman how many of the signers were slaveholders. He personally knew some of them, and knew them to be owners of slaves. The list of names, some of which he read, embraced men of all the professions and employments in the District—judges, lawyers, physicians, merchants, mechanics, and laborers.

As to the question said Mr. S. whether all the signers were inhabitants of this District, I cannot, of course, answer it. I can only say that the petition was presented to this House seven years ago, and has remained on file in the Clerk's Office ever since, open to inspection; and that it has been, during the past year, among the published documents of this House; and, moreover, that it purports on its face to be a petition of inhabitants of this District. Under these circumstances, I submit whether there is not a sufficient presumption that it is what it purports to be, to put gentlemen upon proof of the contrary.

And now, Mr. Speaker, let me entreat gentlemen to look into this petition. I do this the more earnestly, because they will find the names of many there, whom, I am persuaded, they will not be inclined to charge either with ignorance or fanaticism; but on whose truth and intelligence, and judgment they may place the most confident reliance. They state facts which they are in a condition to know, and advance opinions, the soundness of which is not liable to be affected by 'northern prejudices' on this subject. They are in the midst of slavery, and understand what it is. They have witnessed the slave trade, and know something of its horrors; and without any of the doubts of gentlemen in regard to the

power of Congress on this subject, and without any of the apprehensions with regard to the effect of its discussion upon the public peace and safety, which has been made the subject of such glowing descriptions and gloomy anticipations, here and elsewhere, they fearlessly announce the truth in regard both to slavery and the slave trade, and urgently appeal to Congress "as the only body invested by the American Constitution with power to relieve them."

I submit, Mr. Speaker, whether it is not time that these petitioners, sustained as they are by the concurrent supplications of their Northern brethren, should be heard and regarded; and whether the fact that eleven hundred citizens of this District have signed the petition which has just been read, is not a sufficient reply to the argument which has been drawn from considerations connected with a regard to the public safety.

But further: The subject of the abolition of slavery, it is well known, was fully debated in the Legislature of Virginia in the year 1832, when the 'injustice, tyranny, and oppression' of the slave system were openly and boldly maintained; and an effort was seriously made to commence a system of abolition which should look to the final, and not distant, extinction of slavery in that State. And did that discussion produce any symptoms of insurrection among the slaves? No, Sir. And why, indeed, should it? If you, sir, were the owner of one hundred slaves, and should seriously set about measures to give them the boon of freedom, do you think that the first intimation of it would beget in them a spirit of rebellion, and that it would rise in proportion as you should advance your benevolent plans towards their consummation? To suppose this, is to suppose what I want evidence to believe of the African race—that they are so lost to gratitude as to find no inducement to its exercise in such a manifestation of benevolent regard for them as this.

Suffer me, sir, to dwell a few moments longer on the indications of opinion in Virginia on this subject, pending the agitation of the question in the Legislature of that State. While the subject was before a committee of the Legislature, the Editor of the Richmond Enquirer, a well known leading public journal at the Seat of Government of Virginia, said:

"It is probable, from what we hear, that the committee on the colored population will report some plan for getting rid of the free people of color. But is this all that can be done? Are we forever to suffer the greatest evil which can scourge our land not only to remain, but to increase in its dimensions? 'We may shut our eyes and avert our faces, if we please,' (writes an eloquent South Carolinian, on his return from the North a few weeks ago) 'but there it is, the dark and growing evil, at our doors; and meet the question we must at no distant day. God only knows what it is the part of wise men to do on this momentous and appalling subject. Of this I am very sure, that the difference—nothing short of frightful—between all that exists on one side of the Potomac, and all on the other, is owing to that cause alone. The disease is deep seated; it is at the heart's core; it is consuming, and has all along been consuming our vitals, and I could laugh, if I could laugh on such a subject, at the ignorance and folly of the politician who ascribes that to an act of the Government, which is the inevitable effect of the eternal laws of nature. What is to be done? Oh! may God I don't know, but something must be done!'

Yes, something must be done; and it is the part of no honest man to deny it; of no free press to affect to conceal it. When this dark population is growing upon us; when every new census is but gathering its appalling numbers upon us; when within a period equal to that in which this federal constitution has been in existence, those numbers will increase to more than 2,000,000 within Virginia; when our sister States are closing their doors upon our blacks for sale; and when our whites are moving westwardly in greater numbers than we like to hear of; when this, the fairest land on all this continent, for soil and climate and situation combined, might become a sort of garden spot if it were worked by the hands of white men alone, can we, ought we to sit quietly down, fold our arms, and say to each other, 'well, well, this thing will not come to the worst in our day. We will leave it to our children and our grand-children and great-grand-children to take care of themselves, and to brave the storm? Is this to act like wise men? Heaven knows we are no fanatics. We detest the madness which actuated the *Amis des Noirs*. But something ought to be done. Means sure, but gradual, systematic but discreet, ought to be adopted for reducing the mass of evil which is pressing upon the South, and will still more press upon her the longer it is put off. We ought not to shut our eyes nor avert our faces. And though we speak almost without a hope, that the committee or Legislature will do any thing, at the present session, to meet this question,

"The gentleman who opened the debate on the side of abolition, said: 'It was a truth held sacred by every American and by every Republican throughout the world, and he presumed it could not be denied in that hall, as a general principle, that it is an act of injustice, tyranny, and oppression, to hold any part of the human race in bondage against their consent. That circumstances may exist which may put it out of the power of the owners, for a time, to grant their slaves liberty, he admitted to be possible; and if they do exist in any case, it may excuse, but not justify, the owner in holding them. The right to the enjoyment of liberty is one of the most precious, inherent, inalienable rights which pertain to the whole human race, and of which they can never be divested, except by an act of gross injustice.'

yet we say now, in the utmost sincerity of our hearts, that our wisest men cannot give too much of their attention to this subject, nor can they give it too soon."

The honorable gentleman from Virginia will suffer me to commend this expression of sentiment to the deliberate attention which the high standing and responsible position of its author, and the peculiar circumstances under which he wrote, eminently entitle it. Especially would I commend to the honorable gentleman from South Carolina the declaration of the "eloquent South Carolinian," embodied in the article I have just read. The able Editor of the Richmond Enquirer, and his eloquent correspondent, both had a near view of the evils of slavery, and describe them in a language which at once attests their sincerity, and commands assent to the correctness of their views upon this 'momentous and appalling subject.'

I will add, that the other leading paper at the capital of Virginia, the Richmond Whig, made about the same time the following declaration:

"We affirm, that the great mass of Virginia herself triumphs that the slavery question has been agitated and reckons it 'glorious that the spirit of her sons did not shrink from grappling with the monster.' 'We affirm that, in the heaviest slave districts of the State, thousands have hailed the discussion with delight, and contemplate the distant but ardently desired result, as the supreme good which a benevolent Providence could vouchsafe to their country.'

Mr. Speaker, if it was 'glorious' and safe for Virginia to 'grapple with the monster' in 1832, is it inglorious and unsafe for the Congress of the United States to grapple with the same monster now?

Suffer me, Mr. Speaker, to present one more expression of opinion on this subject. I leave Virginia, and go over the mountains into the valley of the Mississippi; and I there find the following recent resolution of the Synod of Kentucky upon the subject of emancipation:

"Resolved, That a committee of ten be appointed, to consist of an equal number of ministers and elders, whose business it shall be to digest and prepare a plan for the moral and religious instruction of our slaves, and for their future emancipation, and to report such plan to the several presbyteries within our bounds, for their consideration and approval."

The committee appointed under this resolution, of whom John Brown, Esq. was chairman, and the Rev. John C. Young, President of Danville College, Secretary, made a report, in which, among other things, they say:

"1. A part of our system of slavery consists in depriving human beings of the right to acquire property. 2. The deprivation of personal liberty forms another part of our system of slavery. 3. The deprivation of personal security is the remaining constituent of our system of slavery." Its effects are said to be: "1. To deprave and to degrade its subjects, by removing from them the strongest natural checks to human corruption. 2. It dooms thousands of human beings to hopeless ignorance. 3. It deprives its subjects, in a great measure, of the privileges of the gospel. 4. This system licenses and produces great cruelty. 5. It produces general licentiousness among the slaves. 6. This system demoralizes the whites as well as the blacks. 7. This system draws down upon us the vengeance of Heaven." These several points, in their order, are illustrated and enforced at length. Then follow confutations of the various arguments of the defenders of the system. Then—

"As the conclusion of all that has been advanced, we assert it to be the unquestionable duty of every Christian to use vigorous and immediate measures for the destruction of this whole system, and for the removal of all its unhappy effects. Both these objects should be contemplated in its efforts."

Mr. Speaker, is it regarded by good and intelligent men in Kentucky as safe openly to recommend a 'destruction of the whole system of slavery?' and shall we be quailing before the dangers of doing it in the District of Columbia?

But, sir, I have another authority on this subject. I return from the Valley of the Mississippi to this District, and looking into the United States Telegraph of the 4th of September last, I find the following: Speaking in the name of the Southern people, the Editor says:

"We hold that our sole reliance is on ourselves: that we have most to fear from the gradual operation on public opinion among our slaves, and that those are the most insidious and dangerous invaders of our rights and interests, who, coming to us in the guise of friendship, endeavor to persuade us that slavery is a sin, a curse, an evil. It is not true that the South sleeps on a volcano—that we are afraid to go to bed at night—that we are fearful of murder and pillage. Our greatest cause of apprehension is, from the operation of the morbid sensibility which appeals to the consciences of our own people, and would make them the voluntary instruments of their own ruin."

So, then, the fears are not of insurrection, but of conscience—not of the physical force of the slaves, but of the power of "public opinion!"

Need I, Mr. Speaker, repeat the expression of my sincere conviction, that the fears expressed by gentlemen on this floor are groundless? And is it not apparent, that the true ground of fear on this subject is to be found in a continuance of the 'dark and growing evil,' so well described by the 'eloquent South Carolinian,' to which our attention has been directed? Permit me to

add, in the language of the Richmond Enquirer, in the article I have read, that "our wisest men cannot give too much attention to this subject, nor can they give it too soon."

But there is another objection sometimes urged against legislating on the subject of slavery, which must not be overlooked in this discussion. Every attempt to disturb the existing relation of master and slave, it is said, tends to disturb the balance of the Constitution, inasmuch as it was among the compromises which entered into the formation of that instrument, that three fifths of the slaves should be represented in this body.

Now sir, in the first place, let it be observed that we are not asked to legislate on the abolition of slavery in Virginia or South Carolina, but in the District of Columbia; and that our legislation disturbs the balance of the Constitution only by the influence of its example upon the slaveholding States.

In the second place, I contend that a just exercise of all the powers granted in the Constitution can never disturb its true balance, but is itself the preservation of that balance.

If the Constitution authorizes Congress to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, and the tendency of the exercise of that power should be to abolish Slavery in the Slave States, and thus reduce their representation in this body, it is a constitutional result, of which no State has a right to complain. As well might we complain of the abolition of slavery in the West India Islands by Great Britain, because its tendency is to produce the same result in the United States. Neither Congress in the one case, nor Great Britain in the other, is under any responsibility for the consequences of a rightful exercise of power—I mean, a responsibility to the Constitution in the one case, and the Law of Nations in the other.

But, sir, the balance of the Constitution is already disturbed, in the other direction.

When the Constitution was adopted, the Mississippi on the West, and Florida on the south, formed the limits of the Confederate Republic. For any thing contemplated in the Constitution, these boundaries formed impassable limits, beyond which a slave population could not bring into Congress a representation upon that basis. The purchases of Louisiana and Florida have added two additional slave States, and will, probably, ere long, add two more. And do gentlemen reflect how much this has disturbed the balance of the Constitution?

But this is not all. The balance, in point of fact, has been disturbed, and must be more so, by the great relative increase of the slave population of the South, and the diminution, almost the extinction, of it at the North. And although this is not, of course, an unconstitutional increase, yet it is obvious that the enormous and alarming relative increase of the slave population, compared with that of the whites, was not within the contemplation of the men who formed the Constitution.

Thus, in the four Atlantic States south of the Potomac, the increase of the whites from 1790 to 1830 was 84 per cent.; while that of the slaves was, during the same period, 136 per cent. In South Carolina the disproportion was still greater; the increase of the whites, during the same period, having been 94 per cent., while that of the slaves was 194 per cent.

To what results, Mr. Speaker, are the principles which produce such a disproportionate increase of population, to lead us? What will, in the progress of fifty years, become of the balance of the Constitution? These are questions which deeply concern the free States.

But there is another question which comes home to the slave States with tremendous and appalling interest. What will be their condition half a century hence, in reference to this subject? That period will roll away; and the principles which govern the advance of the slave population will continue to operate! And yet gentlemen say, 'hands off'—let us alone. 'We will leave it to our children, and our grand-children, and our great-grand-children, to take care of themselves, and to brave the storm!'

But, sir, I will pursue this train of thought no farther. I leave it, and with it, the subject which the House has so kindly indulged me in discussing.

Deeply convinced, sir, that the petitioners have a right to ask us to abolish slavery and the slave trade within this District, and that we have not only the right, but that it is our bounden duty forthwith to commence the one, and to begin and finish the other, I must ask, when the proper time shall come, that the petitions shall be referred to a select committee, to the end that they may have the speedy and decisive action of this body. It seems to me to be due to the great importance of the subject that they should be thus disposed of. Sir, we must not bury these petitions. And let me say to gentlemen, that such a policy will certainly defeat itself. You cannot smother investigation of this subject. Sir, the spirit of free inquiry is the master spirit of the age. It bows to the authority of truth and reason and Revelation; but it bows to nothing else. It must have free course, and it will have it; giving life and soul and energy to the march of liberal principles, and destined to shake every institution on earth which does not recognise the 'inalienable rights' of man, and bow to the supremacy of just and equal laws. And, sir, it shall move onward, and onward, and onward, until every kindred and tongue and people under Heaven shall acknowledge and glory in the great truth that "all men are created equal."

HINTS FOR THE SEASON.

The foundation of knowledge and virtue are laid in your youth; if at any other time the structure must be insecure and imperfect.

He that will not hear the admonitions of a friend deserves to feel the corrections of an enemy.

A warm heart requires a cool head. Fancy without judgment is all sail and no ballast.

Try to love labor: if you do not want it for food you may for physic.

He who spends most of his time in mere sports and recreations, is like him whose garments are made altogether of fringe, and whose diet is nothing but sauce.

Liberty unreasonably obtained, is apt to be intemperately used.

Industrious wisdom often prevents what lazy folks think inevitable.

The death which prevents dotage comes more opportunely than that which ends it.

No trees bear fruit in autumn unless they blossom in the spring.

Happy is the man who can be acquitted by himself in private, and by others in public.

Temperance in youth is the assurance of vigorous old age.

Excess not only brings grey hairs, but green years, with sorrow to the grave.

Let us not judge of a book by the author, but of the author by the book.

Without reading the best natural parts become dry and barren.

Religion is the best armour but the worst cloak.

He who speaks against religion, may be suspected of being fretted by it in his conscience. The galled jade winces and flings.

Christian patience is surer than stoical resolution. The one calms, the other benumbs the soul.

The less occasion for sin, the worse it is. In old age it is like the shadows towards the evening—enormous.

When St. Paul bid us pray without ceasing he means that our words and actions should always be conformable to reason and religion. Constant virtue is ceaseless prayer.

It is an error to condemn pleasures merely as such; they may be innocent as well as criminal.

Let youth be aware that the first impressions which the world takes of us seldom or never wear out.

He that charges an enemy does not show himself more brave than he who holds up against severe disease.

When we have often balked our appetites by denying them what they crave, they will ere long grow so gentle that they will crave no more. Neither riches nor poverty bless or curse any man but according to his spirit and understanding.

We should not measure men by Sundays without looking to what they do all the week after.

Silk. Gov. Everett, in his late Message to the Massachusetts Legislature, makes the following sensible remarks on the subject of the silk culture.

"In the month of April last, a law was passed to encourage the reeling and throwing of Silk." It provided that any person who should reel, or cause to be reeled, or throw or cause to be thrown in the Commonwealth, from cocoons produced from silk worms raised in Massachusetts, merchantable silk, capable of being manufactured into the various silk fabrics, shall be entitled to a bounty of fifty cents, for every pound of silk thus reeled or thrown. It has been represented that the terms on which this bounty is offered render it nearly, if not quite, inoperative. If it be the design of the Legislature, to encourage in this way the attempts made to introduce this important branch of industry into Massachusetts, the law for that purpose will probably require revision. There are good grounds for the opinion that the manufacture of silk will become one of the greatest interests in Massachusetts. It originated in the remotest antiquity, in a region whose climate under the same parallels of latitude and circumstances is similar to ours. This consideration, with the experiments already made in the culture of the Chinese mulberry and the raising of the silk worm, furnishes much reason to believe that the climate of New England will prove peculiarly favorable to both. The adaptation of the requisite machinery for reeling and the other processes of the manufacture opens a field for the exercise of that mechanical ingenuity, which is a marked characteristic of our citizens. Should the anticipations warranted by these circumstances be happily realized, silk will become a staple product of the country, both for consumption and exportation, second to no other as a branch of industry and a source of wealth."

The snow storm.—It has been thought by the people in general that the fall of snow with which New York was favored on Saturday and Sunday, might be accounted a very fair specimen of the article: but it seems to have been a mere circumstance compared with what was done at Utica on the same occasion. Here we had considerable rain and an interjectional sprinkle of hail to vary our enjoyments. But there it was all snow from 4 P. M. on Friday until 1 P. M. on Sunday. The average depth on a level was rather more than three feet, but where drifts had formed, the hills of snow were from six to eight feet in altitude. The streets were of course, impassable, until an army of laborers, employed by the common council, had dug paths through the glittering encumbrance. The aldermen turned out on horseback in their respective wards, inspecting the condition of the hou-